

OUR THANKSGIVING:

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ITS OBJECTS AND MOTIVES.

A SERMON

BY

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DELIVERED IN ST. PAUL'S CHURCH, BOWMANVILLE, CANADA,

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“I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us.”—Is. lxiii. 7.

“In every thing give thanks.”—1 Thess. v. 18.

THE sweet singer of Israel opens one of his beautiful songs of praise with the words, “It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord.” The very mention of lovingkindness received from God is profitable to the recipient. It is also well pleasing to the bestower. Every review we take of God’s mercies tends to awaken and strengthen in our souls feelings of obligation, gratitude, and praise to Him; and if we cease to recall and meditate on His favours, they will soon fade from our recollection and be forgotten, and we will cease to have either sense of indebtedness or desire to give thanks for them. The return of an annual day of thanksgiving affords us a happy opportunity of taking such review, and of presenting the tribute of a becoming gratitude. And since we have been convoked to-day by the representative of the Crown to unite with all our fellow-countrymen in giving thanks for the mercies of the year to Him “from whom all blessings flow,” we may conjoin in this service the duty of good citizens with that of humble Christians. And

we earnestly ask the Lord to be in this, and in all the assemblies throughout the Dominion which meet to-day to render thanks for His mercies. May He both inspire and accept our united offering !

In the first part of the Scripture announced as our text we have the prophet Isaiah declaring that he "will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord, and His praises, according to all the Lord has bestowed on us,"—or, giving the first verb the causative sense contained in the original, putting for lovingkindnesses its synonym, *mercies*, and leaving out the pleonastic copulative *and*, we may read His words, "I will cause the mercies of the Lord to be remembered, the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us." Thus the prophet recalls and makes mention of God's mercies bestowed on His people, both that He may cause them to remember favours already received, and that God may also be reminded of them through the expressions of His people's gratitude. In the second part of the text we have the apostle Paul urging on those he addresses the discharge of an important duty, viz.: giving thanks for *every thing* God is pleased to bestow. Says he: "In every thing give thanks." The apostle enjoins the duty for which the prophet's review of God's mercies prepares the way. They unite in furnishing us with a theme for our thought, which is appropriate for the occasion, and which I hope may be profitable to us, *i.e., mentioning the objects and urging the duty of thanksgiving ; or briefly, the objects and motive of our thanksgiving.*

I. In the first place, we will endeavour to help you to remember God's mercies by making mention of some of

them. When we consider them in their widest extent, they appear numerous as the blades of grass in spring, or the leaves before the winds of autumn. They are spread before us in the heavens over our heads, and come down on us in the floods of light which the sun scatters over us by day, and the moon and stars by night. We also enjoy them in the bounties which a generous earth beneath our feet so freely yields to supply the wants of all things that live. All nature is full, and overflows with God's mercies, even as springs of sparkling and refreshing waters when gushing from an unseen and inexhaustible source; also in the capacities and cravings of our natures in connection with the abundant means provided for appropriately filling and satisfying them. As in our own constitution and nature, so in the constitution and nature of things, God's mercies abound. In the managing, as in the making of the world, God shews His benevolence toward all sentient creatures. He affords provision and protection even to the weakest of His creatures, through those instincts for seeking needed food, and readiness for escaping from impending danger, which He has given them. It would be most pleasant, did time permit, to traverse these fields over which God's mercies are scattered so liberally, and gathering some of them, cause you to remember them. But we must limit our survey by the time at our disposal and by the object for which we have to-day been called together. We shall therefore employ the time remaining to us in this part of our subject in bringing before you, under a few general points of view, the mercies which God has bestowed on us as a people during the year.

We may first mention in a general way *the increase of our temporal prosperity* in the year. The channels of all kinds of business flow with a fuller and more vigorous current than for some time before. All our industries are both more active and remunerative. Agriculture, manufacturing and commercial pursuits and interests have made generous returns for the skill and labour invested in them; also, every kind of labour finds ready employment and fair wages. The increase of our fields and of our flocks is not merely equal to meet the wants of home consumption, but yields a large surplus for the wants of those who elsewhere need them. Then the facilities for transportation of all marketable products is increasing through the enterprise of competing lines, as well as the opening up of new ones. Besides, the area for the profitable prosecution of farming and agricultural industries is widening indefinitely in the new and productive lands of the North-West. In them a rapidly increasing population, whose enterprise and perseverance must command success, will be sure to attract many new settlers to that new region. The outlook for national development as well as personal advantage in this vast field is most promising. There are great possibilities there opening before us, and while we hail them with joy, we admit it is this rather than what is actually realized for which we are grateful. It is with us, to a large extent, as when we look on a fine and healthy child who promises by-and-by to become a vigorous man; we are delighted with the child, not because we see him actually a man, but because we see in him the possibilities of all we admire in a man. We see greatness in type, in promise,

as it were in prophecy. These great possibilities will in due time become, no doubt, great realities. The future which opens before the country now is, and for many years must be, toward the west. One of the chief factors in realizing a full success will be the successful opening and operating of that great national work, the Canada Pacific Railroad. When it rushes over the thousands of miles between the eastern and western borders of the country, it will be the bearer of thousands of thrifty settlers to their new fields, and of carrying their products to the markets of the East. As, then, we take the most cursory view of our increasing prosperity for the year, we thank God as well for the possibilities opening before us, as for all actually realized.

But to be more specific: we must mention *the general enjoyment of good health* by our people during the year as a great mercy for which we are to give thanks. It is indeed true that not a few have borne pain or been under the power of disease. Some have been afflicted in the members of their families, and the homes of others have been darkened by the shadow of bereavement. This must be true in every year of our world's history. There can be no escape from it while we are liable to disease and death. We have not been visited, however, by any distressing epidemic, wasting plague, or noisome pestilence, though a year ago numerous predictions of such calamities were made by prophets of evil, who saw fearful omens in the sky portending great disaster in this year. It was asserted that because certain of the larger planets would be *in conjunc'ion*, and in their orbits would be in the position of *perihelion*, great climatic and atmos-

pheric disturbances would take place, and malarial influences become so active that all great centres of population in the old world, and many in the new, would by disease be decimated or wholly depopulated. No such scourges, we are happy to say, have wasted the people of the East, nor disturbed us of the West. There has not even been the appearance of that too frequent and always dreaded visitant, the yellow fever, to any portion of the southern seaboard. It is God, the God of Providence, who is full of goodness and mercy, and not chance, or astrology, or luck, who rules in the realm of life and health. And we give joyful thanks to Him to-day for shielding us from all such calamities, and for clothing our faces with the glow of health, as well as our loved ones who are not with us.

But again, *for the blessing of peace* throughout the land, and around all our widely extended border, we render thanks to-day. No sounds of war have been heard either from invading foe or of civil strife. Our tranquillity has been so undisturbed that we have been able to devote our undivided strength and time to prosecuting the arts of peace. Those of us who know nothing of the evils of war from experience of them may be well satisfied to remain long in practical ignorance of them. For soon it lays the hand of a complete paralysis on every industry, and stays the productive energies of a people. It also wastes their accumulations and destroys their resources; besides, it spreads feelings of insecurity and alarm among a people. With a frontier so vast and a population so sparse as ours, great would be our danger if nature, happy circumstances, and the favour of Provi-

dence did not combine for our defence. But on three sides we have the impregnable defences of nature—the Atlantic Ocean on the east, the Pacific on the west, and along our undefined northern border we have a fortification stronger than a Chinese wall, in the girdle of almost perpetual ice and snows encircling us. Then along our vast southern frontier we have a powerful and friendly neighbour, to whom we are related by the strong ties of sameness of origin, of language, of religion, and of civilization; and never have these ties united us in closer or stronger friendship, we are happy to believe, than at the present time. Long may we each, pursuing the path of his own orbit, exert a beneficial influence on the other, and therein move on to the highest prosperity!

Closely related to the blessing of peace is the *universal prevalence of security and civil order*. The fabric of civil government is constructed, and power is lodged in the hands of its chief officers mainly for the protection of life and property. We are surely enjoying these blessings in a pre-eminent degree. Also, justice is dispensed with impartial hand to all the people, and is not swayed from its proper course by either personal influence or interests. We even venture to assert that no country of such extent, at so early a period in its civil life, can boast a greater degree of order and security; nor has any country under like circumstances sustained a judiciary so able, so far above reproach, and so faithful to its high trusts. It is matter of gratitude, and perhaps of congratulation, that though we are not free from the bitterness of political agitation and party strife, no outrage has, during the year, been committed against any of our leaders or rulers.

We looked with horror at the sad spectacle presented to us a few weeks ago of the head of a great and free state suddenly struck down by the murderous bullet of a cowardly assassin; and this when he was in the prime of life, in the enjoyment of a rare popularity, and fulfilling to the general satisfaction the high trusts which not long before had been committed to him by the voice of the popular suffrage. We abhor and detest the crime which has deprived our neighbours of the United States of a citizen so irreproachable, of a statesman so able, and of a President so exemplary. We even wonder that in a country regarded as the home of freedom and the guardian of liberty, so fell an outrage could be perpetrated; and it is also saddening, though not perhaps so strange, as we roll the curtain of the year a little further back, to gaze on another tragedy in some respects so like this, but in others so wholly unlike it—*i.e.*, the destruction of the life of the Czar of the ancient autocracy of Russia by a missile hurled by that incarnation of anarchy and destructiveness known as Nihilism. Alexander II., though not the head of a popular government nor sovereign of a free people, was yet a lawful, and, in comparison with most of his predecessors on the throne of Russia, a clement ruler. It will, no doubt, be a topic which will interest some of the students of political history to explain how, in the same year, in the broad light of day, by similar means, while each was peacefully pursuing his proper duties, the heads of two countries so different in their forms of government, in their political principles, and in the exercise of popular rights and enjoyment of popular freedom, should be cut off in so tragic and so

cowardly a manner. We do not boast of, but are thankful for, freedom during the year from such outrages on the lives of our honoured and prominent citizens. And we heartily thank God for peace, good order and security, in all parts of our country, for all classes of our people.

Also, we must recall and mention another mercy which God has bestowed upon us in *the bountiful harvest and fruitful year* He has given us. The increase of the field has been generous. We have plenty to supply the wants of all our people and also our cattle. There is even a superabundance, for which there is need in the mother country, and good prices are offered in return. Our season, unlike that of the United Kingdom, which was so much marred by excess of rains, has been most favourable both in the time of maturing and of ingathering. Our flocks have also been multiplied, and our cattle have not been suffered to decrease. The supply of our comforts and the increase of our wealth from these sources has been much. Also, our trees have not cast their fruit, but in their season have yielded us their delicious stores. We have enjoyed the luscious berry, and we have plenty of the mellowed apples. From field and flock, from garden and orchard, even from the lakes and rivers, God has made bounteous provision for us. We cannot justly say less, or otherwise, than "He has crowned the year with His goodness."

And before passing from this review, and while our hearts are full of grateful recollections of God's bounties, let me remind you of what we owe to any among us who may, from any cause, have been unable to secure the portion they need. Let us with kindly eye look after them,

and with modest yet liberal hand supply them. The poor are God's pensioners, and we who are stewards of God's bounties are their . In dealing with them and for them, we do a service also for God. There is plenty provided by the Father for us all, and let us not withhold help where it is needed. Even let us seek out every one of our brethren who may need; nor let us be too curious in criticizing the poor stranger who may sojourn among us, even though we know little of his history. It is better to relieve ninety-nine undeserving ones than to neglect one who is worthy.

I must not fail to cause you to remember the loving-kindness of the Lord bestowed on us and our people *in continuing to us the blessings of the Gospel, and in extending and prospering His work* during the year. Jesus Christ, the light of the world, is shining with clear and healing beams on Canada. If we walk not in His light, it is because we love darkness rather. Through this Gospel His people are making increase in grace and truth, in life and peace, in joy and hope; also, many are by its power gathered from the world into the kingdom of our Lord. The different tribes of Israel in the land are pressing forward, both in the work around their homes and forward into the North-West, rapidly, as the wave of settlement advances. Churches are being organized and Christian societies formed in its most sparsely settled portions. Even away beyond the reach of the railroad whistle, and where the telegraph wire has not been stretched, the sound of worshipping assemblies is heard, and the melody of their worship rolls over the scarcely broken expanses of the prairie. We gratefully

recognize the goodness of God in honouring the branch of the Church to which we belong, both in her growth and her activity, in helping forward His work. He is enlarging and strengthening her, so that, full of unity and vigour, she now extends from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, and from our southern border on the United States to the farthest settlements on the North, and in this wide region, with increasing zeal, liberality and success, is labouring for the Master. For not only has the increase of our whole Church during the year been cheering—not only have our numerous outposts and missions been maintained, but new fields have been mapped out, and the banner of the Cross has been raised in eighteen hundred and eighty-one where it had not before been unfurled. Yet we must remember, “much land remains to be possessed.”

We, as a congregation, have reason to mention to-day with gratitude the season of deep religious spiritual quickening and growth in grace enjoyed by us in the beginning of the year. We also recall the lovingkindness of the Lord bestowed on you in your growing liberality and zeal on behalf of all the enterprises of our Church as a whole. We have been stepping, each year, for some time, a little in advance of the one going before, and the past year has shewn some gain on any of its predecessors. It is still true we have not yet reached the measure of our ability or of our duty. But we have reason both to thank God and take courage. And as we mention the mercies of the Lord in so many other ways, let us not fail to keep before us that He has continued the Gospel and extended His work during the year.

Having thus made mention of the mercies of the Lord which He has bestowed on us,

II. Let us, in the next place, consider some of the *motives* we have for rendering to Him the tribute of our thanksgiving. And we may say, first, because all our mercies come from Him, and He is well pleased with the offering of a grateful thanksgiving for them. If we receive or do favours one to another, though they be small as the giving of a cup of cold water, even though the giver be one whose duty is to serve us, we yet feel impelled by the promptings of an innate gratitude to offer some return of thanks. We would even charge that person with lack of gratitude or lack of courtesy who would refuse, in return for a favour received, to give thanks. When, then, we consider the greatness and the number of God's mercies, of which we are the daily recipients, we must charge ourselves, and all who fail to gratefully acknowledge His benefits, with the guilt of ingratitude and disregard of the honour of God. Did we proportion our returns to the greatness, the number, the everdurlingness of God's mercies, the stream of gratitude would never run dry in our hearts, and we would never be without reasons for praise.

And surely we cannot, by any sophistry of reason, bring ourselves to believe that the good things we enjoy are not so in His gift and power that we may truly say they all come from God. Not unfrequently, indeed, we find persons who, being successful in their business and in the pursuits of life, ascribe their prosperity to the judgment or ability with which they laid their plans, or to the wisdom with which they combined and con-

centrated divergent interests, or to the energy with which they carried all into effect. Or they perhaps ascribe all to a happy concurrence of circumstances over which they had no control. All these ways of speaking and reasoning virtually ignore or deny the controlling presence and influence of God. They are in the very face of that lesson of God's Word (Deut. viii.) which we read this morning, which, warning us of this danger, declares "for it is the Lord (He) that giveth thee power to get wealth." It is really with every man's business as it is with the husbandman's crop—its success is from God. For apart from cultivation of the ground, sowing of the seed and care of the crop, its increase depends on what the farmer cannot do or give—on the sunshine, on the rain and salubrious atmosphere. These are outside as well as apart from what is in His hands. So are the sources of prosperity and success. It is even true that God bestows whatever talents, wisdom or energy we have upon us, and we should therefore give thanks to Him alone.

This, which is true of every individual, is true when we consider the reason and motive to national thanksgiving—all the blessings which to-day cheer and gladden us—our increasing prosperity, whether in local or special cases or in the condition of the country at large, all of which we hail with joy, we attribute to God as the source of all. We therefore do not render our thanksgivings to our gracious Sovereign the Queen, good and beloved as she truly is, wise and beneficent as has been her reign, and happy as is our relation to her and to the empire, and heartily and devoutly as we can say

and pray "God save the Queen"—it is to God, the Supreme Ruler, whom she and we alike delight to honour and adore. Nor do we to the gifted young nobleman who fills the vice-regal throne, though grateful for the honour of having the worthy son of so distinguished a house at the head of our affairs, and are happy to believe he has used his high position only to promote the prosperity of the whole country. Nor, again, do we render our thanksgiving to our Government, though we acknowledge its energy and enterprise in pressing forward affairs of national importance, and in giving effect to long-contemplated plans for the development of the country, especially in the North-West. It is still to be remembered that neither to Sovereign, nor Governor-General, nor to the Ministry, nor to ourselves do we owe the mercies we enjoy, or render thanksgiving for them, but to the King of kings and to the Lord of lords, who crowns the year and our lives with His goodness.

Besides, we have both reason and motive for thanksgiving for everything God bestows in the good effect it produces in our hearts and on our character. It is quite common to admit that for prosperity, success, or good fortune, we shall be grateful and give thanks. But it is not so common to see in adversity, in calamity, in misfortune, anything of blessing or mercy, disposing us to gratitude and giving of thanks. We heard a gentleman of considerable intelligence, and some aspiration for popular favour, remark three years ago, on a day set apart for thanksgiving, that "he did not think we had much reason for thanksgiving that year inasmuch as it was not specially prosperous." He failed

to appreciate the precious blessings which even then God was liberally bestowing, and left altogether out of view the fact that the discipline of such a condition might contain the germs of the most lasting blessings, and, as seen from its after effects, might be one for which, above others, to be grateful. A young nation is, I apprehend, very much like a young person. The uninterrupted flow of prosperity tends to produce pride, arrogance and extravagance. It is well for the young man early in life to be trained out of these vicious tastes and tendencies. That which does it is good, even though disagreeable and hard to be borne. It must be done, however, if in the far future he is to be a great success. Now, if God has a great future in store for this people—as I believe He has—we ought not to disregard the discipline of adversity, or fail to be thankful for it when sent. That is a mercy which checks in our young national life the growth of arrogance, extravagance, and trust in worldly prosperity, and which nurtures virtue, integrity, truth, honesty and justice. This will be of more value to the people a hundred years from now than the most unbroken prosperity. It will moderate habits, repress folly, and teach industry and self-reliance. It is not great prosperity which nurtures great virtues in a nation, but great virtues lead to great prosperity and permanence. The nations of the past which attained greatness and wealth, but yielded themselves to extravagance and self-indulgence, hasted to their ruin just as they gave way to their excesses. The seeds of a people's weakness and decay is undoubtedly sown in their baseness and want of virtue, while a people's strength and permanence

is in their moral excellencies. Likewise ought we personally to thank God for everything He bestows, whether it be prosperous or adverse. In so regarding God's dealings that we see mercy and goodness in them all, we learn to entertain right feelings toward Him, and right apprehensions of His beneficent and fatherly designs toward us. We may learn by the friction of our sharpest trials how God brightens in us the most beautiful of virtues. By sufferings grievous to be borne, He may mellow and mature the gentlest and sweetest of Christian graces. By the smelting heat of the furnace He may burn out the dross of our old natures, and leave the pure metal only the brighter. By all the afflictions He is pleased to send, He does indeed produce in those rightly exercised the peaceable fruits of righteousness. In all and for all these bestowments of God we should therefore give Him thanks. When the zealous and eloquent Chrysostom, the chief pastor of the Church of Constantinople, was banished by his persecutors in the fourth century from his home and work to the inhospitable regions of the Caucasus and Isuria, he was accustomed in his poverty and exile to say joyfully in his daily prayers and frequent ejaculations, "Glory to God for everything." His gratitude and praise exceeded even the measure of his sufferings, and God was his exceeding joy. When Samuel Rutherford of Alnwich, in Gallowayshire, Scotland, was driven from his flock and home in the iron time of religious intolerance, he wrote some of his memorable letters during his imprisonment in Aberdeen. In one of these he says: "I never knew before that His love was in such a measure. Though I am sick and

in pain, yet am I sick of love ; my sickness is my life and health." Paul and Silas, in the dungeon of Philippi, during the darkness of the night, when their limbs were stretched on the stocks, and their backs still bleeding from the stripes inflicted by the cruel hands of an unfeeling jailor, gave praise to God for all, for we are told "they prayed and sang praises to God." Like these true servants of God, we should regard all God bestows as in some sense a mercy, and as meant in some way to bring us good, and so in love and gratitude we should render thanks for all.

But to come to a close. Gather up in your memories and in your hearts all the good and great things God has done for you this year—for you personally, for you who are accustomed from week to week to worship in this sanctuary, for all our land and to all our people. We have had a whole year of mercies: improvement in the state of our temporal concerns, general good health, peace and security enjoyed throughout the land, a season full of productiveness, and, chief of all, the Gospel's blessings enjoyed and extended among our people. How can we be silent while the bounty of God is lavished with such profusion upon us? How can any one's heart remain unmoved, or his tongue not break forth with songs of thanksgiving? Let us all praise Him for all His mercies :

"For the beauty of the earth,
 For the beauty of the skies,
 For the love which from our birth . . .
 Over and around us lies . . .

AMEN . . .

“ For the joy of ear and eye,
 For the heart and mind's delight ;
 For the mystic harmony,
 Linking sense to sound and sight :

“ For the joy of human love,
 Brother, sister, parent, child ;
 Friend on earth and Friend above,
 For all gentle thoughts and mild :

“ For each perfect gift of Thine,
 To our race so freely given ;
 Graces human and divine,
 Flowers of earth and buds of heaven,—
 Christ, our God, to Thee we raise
 This our sacrifice of praise.”



